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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000869

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PHUM CU EZ EUN

SUBJECT: CZECHS DISAPPOINTED WITH EU CUBA NEGOTIATIONS;
WILL PUSH FOR LIMITS ON HIGH LEVEL VISITS

REF: A. BRUSSELS 2165

¶B. BRUSSELS 2146

¶C. PRAGUE 833

¶D. PRAGUE 832

¶E. PRAGUE 814

Classified By: Pol-Econ Counselor Mike Dodman for reasons 1.4 b+d

¶1. (C) The Czechs are very disappointed with their inability to win support for tougher EU measures towards Cuba. MFA Cuba Desk officer Petr Mikyska confirmed assessments provided to USEU by Solana's office (ref A) from this week's COLAT and PSC meetings. Mikyska said that, despite their optimism last week (refs B and C) following bilateral discussions with the Spanish and the expulsion from Cuba of European MPs and reporters, the Czechs were isolated at the June 6 COLAT meeting.

¶2. (C) The Czechs were seeking approval for action in three areas: reinstating the 2003 measure of inviting dissidents to national days, limits on high level visits to Cuba, and approval for EU funding to support Cuban dissidents. On national days, Mikyska said the Czechs were prepared to accept a statement that EU Member States were free to invite dissidents to their receptions. The COLAT passed the issue to the PSC, which on June 7 sent the question back to the COLAT for further discussion, meaning that the issue will not be addressed in the conclusions of the June 13 GAERC (Mikyska added that the Czechs will invite dissidents to their October national day reception, regardless of the state of EU deliberations on the question).

¶3. (C) The Czechs are still fighting for their proposal to limit the level of official Member State visits to Cuba. The Czechs propose that the EU authorize Foreign Ministers to travel, but that no other ministers be allowed to make official visits (i.e., only sub-cabinet officials from other ministries). This would facilitate the engagement called for in the 1996 Common Position, and permit FMs to lend support to the opposition movement, but limit the level of recognition afforded Castro. Mikyska said no other country, including Poland, supports the Czech proposal. The PSC will consider it at a meeting June 9, but Mikyska does not expect approval. He believes this is the one issue FM Svoboda will take a stand on at next week's GAERC.

¶4. (C) Mikyska said EU Mission chiefs in Havana proposed EU funding for a variety of projects, including academic, athletic, cultural and "support for dissidents." The latter was challenged by many at the COLAT, with the Czechs actively supporting. Mikyska said the COLAT has asked Commission lawyers for a ruling on whether this is possible. He added that the Czechs have no specific ideas on how such funding would be used, but rather would defer to staff in Havana.

¶5. (C) Mikyska reviewed orally the text of the Presidency's draft Council declaration on Cuba, which tracks with ref B (it repeats the call for the Cuba to release political prisoners and improve civil liberties, and also condemns the expulsion of European observers to last month's opposition meeting). The only open questions, according to the Czechs, are whether the statement that the June 2003 measures remain suspended will be modified by their proposed limitation on high level visits, and the date of the next review. The Czechs want a review after six months, rather than in June 2006. Mikyska said there was no discussion at the COLAT of what stands behind the pledge to deepen the structured dialogue with the peaceful opposition; these details will be worked out by Havana heads of missions.

¶6. (C) Mikyska said the Czechs see the likely outcome of this review as a victory for Castro. Going forward they will continue efforts to make the EU structured dialogue with the opposition effective, they will seek approval for EU funding, and will engage in the next review of the EU policy. But the Czechs have low expectations for any positive change as a result of EU engagement in Cuba; they are not optimistic that the UK Presidency will make it a priority to reinstate any of the 2003 measures. The Czech focus will increasingly be on the sort of bilateral efforts -- official and private -- already underway (refs C and D).

CABANISS